

Undoing the Masculine Hero: Fahadh Faasil's Stardom in Contemporary Malayalam Cinema

[S.S. Sooraj](#), [K.R. Kavya Krishna](#) and [Ajit Kumar Mishra](#)

Introduction

It would not be wrong to call Fahadh Malayalam cinema's first metrosexual actor, a contrast to the moustache-twirling, sexist alpha male heroes who had been dominating the screens for long. This is evident in the way he picks his films—they never fall under the easy labels of celluloid heroism.^[1]

The above statement that appeared in an article in a US-based news website *Huffpost* about Fahadh Faasil, one of the leading stars in the contemporary Malayalam film industry,^[2] points to a major shift in Malayalam cinema in the last decade regarding masculinity, heroism, and stardom. While the Covid-19 outbreak engendered numerous challenges to film industries worldwide, the Malayalam film industry garnered national and global attention through a set of filmmakers and actors who had initiated what is known as the 'New Generation' Malayalam cinema in the early 2010s. Among them, Faasil has become the 'main protagonist' of the 'New Generation' Malayalam Cinema 'by choosing unorthodox, experimental subjects instead of embracing mainstream narratives and aesthetics.'^[3] In this context, this article examines Faasil and his films against the backdrop of the developments in contemporary Malayalam cinema by placing them within the theoretical praxis of masculinity, heroism and stardom.

The first section of the article juxtaposes Faasil with the two superstars in Malayalam cinema—Mohanlal and Mammootty—and their films during the 1990s wherein the male star emerged as a dominant figure by employing upper-caste masculine heroism.^[4] The second section thematically analyses Faasil's select film portrayals pertaining to the 'New Generation' Malayalam Cinema. It studies how the actor, and his film characters, disrupt the good/bad binaries in representing the hero and defying the stereotypical portrayal of the hero as ultimately triumphant and all-powerful. We argue that the hero's association with hegemonic masculinity in the previous decades, spearheaded by superstars such as Mammootty and Mohanlal, is constantly questioned, and the all-pervasive patriarchy within their films is disputed and problematised in Faasil's films. The argument is not that there is a total displacement of heteronormative patriarchal and masculine traits associated with male stardom in Malayalam, but Faasil/his characters embody a rupture in the dominant historic models of masculinity. In the lineage of the relationship between masculinity, heroism and stardom in Malayalam films, Faasil presents an interesting case as his characters add vulnerable masculine traits to the hero figure, offering a new way of presenting masculinity in Malayalam cinema.

The article also examines Faasil's stardom in the context of several developments post liberalisation, including the rapid leap in film technology in Malayalam and the influence of national and global filmic trends.^[5] Multiplex theatres became more common, providing the audience with new modes of cinema viewing.^[6] Mobile phones became a prominent medium for film viewing, further enhanced by the emergence of Over The Top (OTT) platforms such as Amazon Prime, Netflix and other small-scale regional film platforms like Neestream. These newer technologies blended regional and global tastes, and besides developing a new mode of viewing practises, they resulted in Malayalam films becoming popular across transnational spaces. Faasil is one of the stars who actively utilised the potential of such platforms,

and he is often called the 'first OTT superstar.'^[7] Faasil's rise to stardom also coincides with a period in which Kerala underwent a series of crises, including uncertainties in the economy due to the global recession of 2008, the return of expatriates owing to indigenisation in many gulf countries, geographical as well as biological disasters like the flood of 2018, Nipah virus outbreaks (2018)^[8] and later Covid-19 (2019), and many of his characters represent the uncertainties of these times. The article argues that these developments along with the shift in viewing practices aided actors like Faasil to emerge as one of the influential figures in contemporary Malayalam cinema.

Contextualising the emergence of 'New Generation' Cinema: Superstar domination of the 1990s and the crises thereafter

To understand how Faasil disrupts the existing models of masculinity, heroism and stardom in Malayalam cinema, he has to be studied vis-à-vis the two major superstars of the industry—Mohanlal and Mammooty,^[9] especially in relation to the set of upper caste or feudal characters that contributed to their prominence during the 1990s. Both Mohanlal and Mammooty occupy a predominant position within the films and in the public milieu of Kerala through their constant association with dominant models of masculinity. Filippo and Caroline Osella, in their study on Mammooty and Mohanlal, point out how Malayali fans (*payyans*, meaning young men, as the Osellas call them) are caught in a 'mimetic economy' where both these actors play a critical role:

They [fans] take and exchange characteristics, parts of self and other, with their onscreen heroes and with each other, reproducing and newly fashioning over each generation and with each shift in masculine style what it means to be a Malayali man, negotiating the demands of modernity and finding a way to move through the various arenas—family, work, leisure—around him.^[10]

Mammooty's and Mohanlal's characters act in what Richard Dyer terms 'compensatory ways' where these stars 'compensate people for qualities they are lacking in their [fans/audience] lives.'^[11] In the context of Malayalam cinema, by performing as the 'compensation' for Malayali men, these stars epitomise hegemonic masculinity.^[12] Glorifying hegemonic and toxic masculinity especially through the projection of male star bodies with visible markers of their privileged caste and class status, misogyny and the contempt of the subaltern male bodies have been identified as the features of the 1990s superstar movies.^[13] The strengthening of Hindutva politics also contributed to the desirability of upper caste Hindu male characters in the 1990s.^[14] During this era, the theatrical releases of Mohanlal and Mammooty films were accompanied by the installation of huge cut-outs across Kerala and celebrations inside cinema halls when these stars first appeared on screen. On the opening days of such films, the audience mainly consisted of fan clubs led by men and the theatres across Kerala were turned into homosocial male spaces celebrating the male star on screen. Thus, their stardom signifies a crucial intersection between the desires of Malayali men off screen and the hegemonic masculinity represented on screen. This correlation between the stardom and the aspirations of the Malayali men marked the Malayalam cinema's attempt to recreate the 'egalitarian' feudal past where the figure of the feudal lord re-emerged through actors like Mohanlal and Mammooty. This projection of the male star onscreen and offscreen during the 1990s was also aided by the advancement of digital technologies and the popularity of television in post-liberalisation India.^[15] The large capital inflow into the economy also considerably boosted the film industry during this time. Mohanlal and Mammooty efficiently utilised these opportunities offered by liberalisation to their advantage, and they emerged as 'superstars' and/or 'megastars' in Malayalam Cinema after the 1990s.

Following the era of superstar films in the 1990s, the Malayalam film industry entered a period of crisis in the early 2000s. Films with redundant themes failed at the box office, including those of Mohanlal and Mammooty, and the male stars' supremacy was gradually challenged.^[16] The shift in movie-making patterns post-2000s was a means to overcome this crisis. In an attempt to produce financially viable

movies, earlier superhits like *Neelathamara* (The blue lotus, 2009),^[17] *Rathinirvedam* (Venereal disenchantment, 2011)^[18] and others were remade. As most of the stars' films failed to create an impact at the box office, a series of multi-star films were made, including *Pokkiri Raja* (The rogue king, 2010),^[19] *Happy Husbands* (2010),^[20] *Christian Brothers* (2011)^[21] and so on. The success of soft porn movies in the early 2000s was also attributed to the economic crisis in the film industry at that time.^[22] This period also witnessed directors like Ranjith, who wrote films celebrating feudal heroes like *Narasimham* (2000)^[23] and *Devasuram* (Of gods and demons, 1993),^[24] bringing about a thorough overhaul of his thematic concerns by directing films like *Paleri Manikyam: Oru Pathira Kolapathakathinte Katha* (Manikyam of Paleri: A midnight murder story, 2009),^[25] *Pranchiyettan and the Saint* (Brother Pranchi and the Saint, 2010)^[26] and others in which the depiction of stardom as well as masculinity underwent significant changes. Shaji Kailas, who made blockbusters with hypermasculine portrayals of Mohanlal, Mammooty and Suresh Gopi as the lead actors during the 2000s,^[27] failed in the re-employment of the same technique, and several of his films like *Dhrona 2010* (2010),^[28] *Simhasanam* (The throne, 2012)^[29] and others turned out to be failures in the box office. The era also witnessed the emergence of people like Santhosh Pandit, who became (in)famous by using this void in the Malayalam film industry to produce and promote films like *Krishnanum Radhayum* (Krishna and Radha, 2011),^[30] *Superstar Santhosh Pandit* (2012)^[31] and so on.

Amidst these crises when the established directors and actors were struggling to make an impact on the industry, the film *Traffic* (directed by the debutant Rajesh Pillai, released in 2011)^[32] emerged as a major hit of the year. *Traffic* is widely considered to have begun the 'New Generation' cinema wave in Malayalam. 'New Generation' redefined the concept of popular movies, and these films have set 'a commercially viable but artistically uncompromising cinema' as their target.^[33] 'New Generation,' which is reminiscent of the 1980s' 'New Wave' in the Malayalam film history, is marked for its 'simple, novel and socially relevant themes; the absence of any major film stars; the presence of young new actors, both on- and off-screen; and colloquial dialogue, including profane language.'^[34] The heroes in this set of films often border upon villainy and, at times, are subject to mental turmoil and agony.^[35] In other words, the 'New Generation' Malayalam films do not celebrate masculinity/stardom as did the superstar movies of the earlier decade. While 'New Generation' films started exploring alternate masculine expressions, the films of Mammooty and Mohanlal, including some of their contemporary films, still celebrate earlier models of heroism and stardom, such as *Lucifer* (2019)^[36] and *Arattu* (Grand festival, 2022),^[37] is a fact to be acknowledged.

The period also saw several protests against male domination within the Malayalam film industry, including within the major film organisations like the Association of Malayalam Movie Artists (AMMA), the Film Employees Federation of Kerala (FEFKA) and others. The attack on a famous actress in Kochi and the subsequent arrest of Dileep (a major star in Malayalam) further revealed problems in the industry. These events eventually led to the formation of the 'Women in Cinema Collective' (WCC) in 2017. WCC has a close association with 'the feminist imaginaries advanced by various women collectives since the 1980s'^[38] in Kerala and it demands equal opportunity, safety and professional workspaces for women in the Malayalam film industry. This change in gender dynamics in Bollywood, both onscreen and offscreen, that challenge the patriarchal masculine structures is a significant shift after 2010. It is against this larger backdrop that we study Faasil, one of the notable actors of the 'New Generation' Malayalam films, to understand how he deconstructed existing beliefs around stardom and masculinity in the Malayalam movie industry. We argue that Faasil problematised the existing notion of a filmic hero in Malayalam by transgressing good/bad binaries within the narrative. Unlike the hyper-masculine heroes played by superstars in earlier decades, Faasil achieved fame and stardom by portraying contemptible and powerless characters. This shift in the representation of stardom is significant while studying the history of stars in Malayalam cinema.

Fahadh Faasil, the person and the star

Faasil has emerged as one of the leading stars in Malayalam cinema in the last decade. It is significant to note that his career did not commence well though he is from a noted film family in Kerala. His debut as the hero in *Kayyethum Doorath* (Within the hand's reach, 2002),^[39] directed by his father Fazil (a renowned director in Malayalam), was a box-office failure and received largely negative reviews. Consequently, he left for the USA to pursue higher studies and later returned to Malayalam cinema, after seven years, with the film *Kerala Café*,^[40] an anthology film released in 2009. He then acted in minor roles in movies like *Pramani* (2010),^[41] *Tournament* (2010),^[42] *Best of Luck* (2010)^[43] and *Cocktail* (2010).^[44] Faasil rose to fame with *Chaappa Kurishu* (Heads or tails, 2011)^[45] and *Akam* (Inside, 2011),^[46] for which he received the Kerala State Award for the Second-Best Actor in 2011.

We argue that Faasil's re-entry through 'New Generation' films aided him in generating alternative modes of masculine presence in Malayalam cinema. Another notable aspect of Faasil's career is that his rise to popularity coincides with several other socio-political changes in Kerala. This includes the insecurities followed by the economic recession of 2008, the large-scale return of Gulf expatriates due to the indigenisation in the Gulf countries and increasing unemployment. Gulf migration, liberalisation and globalisation are crucial in understanding contemporary Kerala.^[47] All these factors have given rise to new consumption practices in the state while drawing distinct gendered patterns^[48] and new definitions of masculinity.^[49] Though the modern 'breadwinner' ideal remains the dominant mode of masculinity in Kerala, globalised consumption regimes and the increased participation of women in the workforce have intensified men's anxieties.^[50] Some feminist scholars discuss the idea of 'neopatriarchy' that has been evolving with society's changing economic and political patterns.^[51] Sylvia Walby has observed what she calls 'public patriarchy' wherein even though domesticity remains a major mode of subordination of women, they are collectively subjugated within the employment or state structure.^[52] Her analysis is crucial when we consider the persistent problems women and other marginalised groups face in Kerala even though the state is recognised globally for advancing women's conditions and better performances in terms of several other human development indicators.^[53] Along with rising criticism of the Kerala Model,^[54] women, sexual minorities and Dalits continue to face numerous challenges in contemporary Kerala. However, there has been an increased unity among such marginalised groups since the 1990s.^[55] This, in turn, has unsettled masculinity, especially upper-caste masculinity, by challenging its power structure within domestic and public spaces. The visibility of Malayali women and their achievements in terms of literacy and health and the rise of feminist movements have produced a narrative of victimhood among men in Kerala.^[56] Further, the era has also seen the emergence of movements/protests against the heteropatriarchal control on women's sexuality including the Kiss of Love (2014), Catholic Nuns' Protest (2018), Sabarimala women's entry protest (2018), *Arpo Arthavam* (Hail menstruation, 2019) and others that have had a significant impact on the genderscape of Kerala. The period also saw several legal interventions, including decriminalising homosexuality and adultery, banning Triple Talaq, whereby a Muslim man could legally divorce his wife 'in minutes just by saying "talaq" (divorce) three times.'^[57] These changes in the genderscape along with shifts within the film industry following the 'New Generation' film wave, enabled Faasil's characters to mark themselves even when they challenged the existing filmic representations of masculinity and heroism in Malayalam cinema.

One of the significant features of Faasil's career is his active employment of the male body within the films through which he marks its infirmity and a rupture from the 'traditional' masculine ethos. In the earlier decade of superstar films, the male body was a major site for building stardom.^[58] For Mammooty, the physical appeal of his body has been crucial, and this is celebrated with much fervour in Kerala. Popular magazines and channels often choose him as the 'most desirable man' or the man with the 'highest sex appeal.'^[59] For Mohanlal, the limitations of not having a muscular body have been surpassed through the historical construction of his star persona and by the celebration of his feudal characters.^[60] For Mammooty and Mohanlal, the body symbolises their hegemonic masculinity and stardom. Faasil, on the

other hand, has employed his body as an object for contempt and castration within the film narrative. In this way, he deconstructs the notion of masculinity to which stardom in Malayalam cinema is inseparably linked.

A star is studied by taking 'everything publicly available'[61] about them, including films, public appearances, interviews, commercials, and other aspects. All such analyses reveal that Faasil contradicts the notion of a star in the conventional sense of the term in Malayalam cinema. On-screen and off-screen, Faasil is an ordinary man, slightly bald and without six-pack abs or a muscular body. A young hero appearing bald without using wigs was new to the Malayalam film spectators. Faasil's contest with hegemonic masculine notions marks his star persona since the beginning of his career, which is revealed not only through the films but also through his conception of men. In one of his interviews, he adds that he is a representative of ordinary men who are bald, lean or shabby. He is also not reluctant to admit his failures—as an actor in his first film or later as an engineering student in America.[62] This off-screen cosmopolitan persona of Faasil continues to blend with his onscreen masculinity, which draws newer patterns of gender relations within his films that question the centrality of the male hero in Malayalam cinema.

Our analysis of major film magazines in Malayalam such as *Nana* and *Vellinakshatram* reveals that Faasil maintains a low profile and minimal discussion can be found about his personal life. The available coverage in these magazines promotes his movies more than Faasil as a star.[63] He also appears in fewer interviews, both on television channels and in magazines, compared to other celebrities, for which he says that the audience has to merely watch his films and forget about him as a person.[64] He is also the only leading star in Malayalam cinema who does not have a fan club. He has openly objected to others creating a fan club for him.[65] It is particularly important as fan clubs are central in promoting stardom in Malayalam and other South Indian cinemas.[66] Faasil also appears sparsely in advertisements. Furthermore, the videos/interviews produced as part of his film promotions are also markedly different in terms of the collective engagements of other important figures (including the director, scriptwriter and others involved in the filmmaking). They do not focus merely on his stardom. Thus, in multiple ways, Faasil becomes a star without becoming one.[67]

Fahadh Faasil: Undoing masculinity, heroism and stardom

C.S. Venkiteswaran highlights a significant shift in the representation of heroes in Malayalam cinema with the commencement of a 'New Generation' film wave in Kerala. Set in localised Malayali landscapes, the films of this genre re-oriented notions of femininity and masculinity in diverse ways. Emerging after the era of hypermasculine heroes, these films depict men who find it difficult to cope with the changed time and space.[68] In many films of the 'New Generation,' male characters also fail or reform or deteriorate into insanity. This 'erosion of masculinity and obsession with castration' in these films is in tandem with the instabilities in the political economy stirred up by the speculative global economy and it questions the centrality of man within a family and in society.[69] There is also a 'reimagining of the role of women'[70] in these films wherein several women characters are portrayed as breaking out of the patriarchal order to assert freedom and agency. We place Faasil's characters as representative of these changes in Malayalam cinema and the changing gender sensibility of Kerala society. In the following sections, the article does a thematic reading of select Faasil's films to discern how they deconstruct notions of masculinity, heroism and stardom in Malayalam.

Feudal hero to unexceptional man

Though one of the leading male stars in Malayalam, Faasil's characters are constantly marked for their resemblance to the stereotypical image of an anti-hero. His characters lack the typical features associated

with the filmic hero in Malayalam, including courage, physical strength, idealism and so on.[71] However, we argue that they cannot easily be reduced to the singular categorisation of an anti-hero and each of his characters is complex in the way they undo masculinity and heroism in Malayalam cinema. In this regard, one of the movies that turned out to be a trendsetter in the 'New Generation' cinematic wave was *Maheshinte Prathikaram* (Mahesh's revenge, 2016),[72] directed by the debutant Dileesh Pothan. The film won several accolades at national and state levels besides contributing significantly to Faasil's career, elevating him to the position of a notable star in the Malayalam film industry. Set in Prakash, a mountainous village near Kattappana in the Idukki district of Kerala, the movie visualises the ordinariness of the everyday life of Mahesh Bhavana (played by Faasil), a small-time photographer, and his resolve to take revenge, despite his physical and mental ineptitude to achieve it. Though Mahesh/Faasil is the protagonist in the movie, he is presented as an unexceptional man within the film narrative in contrast to the superstar hero of earlier decade Malayalam films. Besides, the film also draws allusions from the superstar movies in several instances to reiterate this difference in the representation of heroic masculinity.

In the introductory scene of *Maheshinte Prathikaram*, Mahesh is shown taking a bath in a stream and washing his rubber slippers (thongs, jandals or flipflops) (which stand as a marker of the character's ordinariness and are a major symbol employed throughout the movie). With a focus on his soft male body in the larger canvas of the mountainous terrain of Idukki, the scene further captures Mahesh/Faasil emerging from the stream humming the heroic introductory song, *Dhyanam Dheyam Narasimham* (a song celebrating the God Narasimha) of the Mohanlal-starrer *Narasimham* (2000). *Narasimham* (directed by Shaji Kailas) is one of the most popular movies of Mohanlal which helped him emerge as a major symbol of neoliberal Hindutva masculinity in Kerala.[73] The film was a blockbuster with the largest ever collection at the box office in the history of Malayalam cinema. 'Narasimha' in Hindu mythology signifies the ferocious avatar of God Vishnu. This attribution of divinity to Induchoodan/Mohanlal is further evident in the hero's introductory scene, where he emerges from the depths of the holy river Nila, which is augmented by camera, music and editing techniques (see Figure 1).[74] Induchoodan wears black attire, traditionally associated with devotees of the God Ayyappa (a celibate deity believed to be the son of two male gods, Shiva and Vishnu) and a neck chain with the *Om* symbol.[75] Furthermore, a fierce, masculine, divine aura is built around the hero by equating him with the avengeful incarnation of God Vishnu (Narasimha), along with allusions to two other hypermasculine deities in Hindu mythology—Shiva (through his name Induchoodan) and Ayyappa (through his attire).

The introductory sequence in *Narasimham* and Mohanlal's dialogues have acquired a cult status among men in Kerala. We argue that *Maheshinte Prathikaram* in a way sarcastically juxtaposes the introduction of Induchoodan/Mohanlal in *Narasimham* to the effect of establishing the contradiction between an ordinary man in Kerala and a superstar hero (see Figure 2). The film's title song, effectively employed to introduce the superstar hero in Malayalam, is also deconstructed in *Maheshinte Prathikaram*. The title song in *Maheshinte Prathikaram* describes and celebrates the locale of Idukki and instead of focusing on the male protagonist, the camera captures the idyllic life of the people in the hilly village and shows Mahesh/Faasil as an ordinary man; one among many. In the song, he is also shown as engaging in his household chores including cleaning and cooking, which are usually considered 'feminine' within the film narratives.[76]

As with the characterisation of Mahesh, many Faasil characters have replaced the feudal hypermasculine heroes of the previous era with unexceptional male protagonists. We argue that this troubles the centrality of the male star on and offscreen in Malayalam cinema post-2010. For example, in *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum* (The mainour and the witness, 2017),[77] he plays the role of a thief whose name is not revealed throughout the movie. In *Amen* (2013),[78] he plays the role of a clarinet player in a village who is unable to display his skill, for which he is publicly humiliated.



Figure 1. All the four images are from the heroic introductory song of Mohanlal's character in *Narasimham* (2000). The first image shows him emerging from the holy River Nila and is the scene where Mohanlal first appears in the film. The second represents him in a yogic position in the middle of the Hindu religious symbol Om. The third image shows him walking amidst fire and the fourth image which is shot from below marks him in a powerful position typical of the many feudal characters in Malayalam cinema.

Source. *Narasimham*, 18:50, 24:02, 24:05, 25:09.



Figure 2. These images are from the introductory song in the film *Maheshinte Prathikaram* (2016). In the first image, Faasil's character is shown bathing in a small stream singing the heroic introductory song of Mohanlal in *Narasimham* (2000). The second image presents him against the background of the mountainous terrain of Idukki (the image of rubber slippers, a recurring symbol in the film, is noted). The third image shows him doing kitchen chores and the fourth image shows him working as a professional photographer.

Source. *Maheshinte Prathikaram*, 3:37, 3:57, 4:48, 6:53.

Un (muscular) hero: Undoing the trope of revenge

The trope of revenge was central to the superstar movies of the 1990s.^[79] Glorification of male body and performing extraordinary or dangerous stunts were the major markers of these films.^[80] The hero was also portrayed as the one who succeeded in the attainment of his love by overcoming many adversities. *Maheshinte Prathikaram* (2016), as we argue, breaks all these conventions associated with the hero and presents a vulnerable man as the protagonist. In the film, Mahesh (Fahadh Faasil) who becomes devastated after his lover Soumya (Anusree) breaks up with him is represented as crying profusely, a rare act for a Mollywood film hero. This act of crying coupled with long shots and close-ups of Faasil's vulnerable, soft body become a unique representation of male tears in Malayalam cinema. *Maheshinte Prathikaram* centred on the trope of revenge shows the protagonist's ineptitude, both physical and psychological. Through such a representation of heroic masculinity, we argue, the film makes a satirical allusion to the trope of revenge and its association with heroism and stardom in Malayalam film. It has a scene where Mahesh gets into an altercation with the antagonist Jimson (Sujith Shankar) to end a fight between Crispin (Soubin Shahir) and Jimson.^[81] This confrontation scene between Jimson and Mahesh in *Maheshinte Prathikaram* alludes to typical action films, especially of the superstars. Mahesh is shown rising from the ground, after being kicked down by Jimson, and folding up his *mundu* (traditional wear and a symbol of feudal virile masculinity in Malayalam cinema) accompanied by an intensifying background

musical score. Unlike the star heroes, Mahesh fails in his attempt to hit Jimson and his *mundu* becomes untied and falls down. This public humiliation forces Mahesh to make a seemingly whimsical vow of revenge against Jimson, and he pledges not to wear his footwear—the rubber slippers—till he fulfils his vow. Mahesh's revenge is presented with a touch of humour throughout the film. Unlike the combative male hero of Malayalam films,[82] Mahesh is shown as a vulnerable ordinary man starting to learn Kungfu (a martial art) to deal with the physically powerful Jimson. Moreover, the film presents the issue between Mahesh and Jimson as a problem between the two individuals without any familial, religious or political undertones and without othering any community or group which has been a characteristic feature of Malayalam films.[83]

Towards the climax, Mahesh triumphs in his fight with Jimson. However, we argue that these action sequences in the film are unique for deconstructing heroic masculinity in Malayalam. Besides lacking the usual single focus on the male star, the scenes also lack background score or any significant editing/visual interventions to magnify the hero. Moreover, following the confrontation, Mahesh is shown patting Jimson on the shoulder in a friendly manner to show that he has no enmity towards Jimson even though he fought and won to salvage his self-esteem. Mahesh even pays a friendly visit to Jimson at the hospital and reveals his wish to marry Jimson's sister, Jimsy. The film here reconfigures the existing pattern of climax in Malayalam films by showing the hero acknowledging the futility of the physical fight and his wish to reconcile with his opponent rather than celebrate his triumph. His character is a hetero patriarchal hero who wins the fight and the heroine's love, but not in the traditionally masculine/heroic style employed in Malayalam movies until then. In the reconciliation with the antagonist, in the exhibition of vulnerability and in the portrayal of the meaninglessness of revenge, there is an embodiment of change in terms of the historic representation of heroic masculinity and the trope of revenge, as here it is reconstituted with compassion and empathy.[84] There are similar Faasil characters who undermine the trope of revenge. For instance, in *Natholi Oru Cheriya Meenalla* (Anchovy isn't a small fish, 2013),[85] the character Preman (played by Faasil) is a fragile and often humiliated caretaker of a flat. His inability to take revenge prompts him to create a fictional alter ego Narendran (played by Faasil himself) to take revenge against the occupants of the flat for mistreating him.

Hero becoming villain: Deconstructing patriarchal family and masculinity

Faasil's role as a patriarchal householder in *Kumbalangi Nights* (2019)[86] can be employed to decode the toxic masculinity and power structures of a hitherto valorised and normalised heterosexual family/family man in Malayalam cinema. The film has several atypical male characters who represent masculinity differently. Faasil plays Shammy, who stays in his wife's house after marriage. The family is comprised of three women—his wife Simmy (Grace Antony), her mother (Ambika Rao) and younger sister Baby Mol (Anna Ben) and is devoid of a father figure. The film shows Shammy desperately trying to establish himself as the patriarch of the house, akin to the heroes in several star movies of 1990s.[87] He attempts to control the women of the family, displays emotional restraint and shows an aversion to cooking as he considers it a feminine task. He appears with a perfectly chiselled moustache, well-dressed and groomed. While these actions usually aid the central male figures in attaining heroic status in Malayalam cinema, in *Kumbalangi Nights* this construction unsettles such representations.[88] We argue that Shammy is a satiric caricature of the hegemonic male protagonists of Malayalam cinema of earlier decades, especially that of Mohanlal and Mammootty and their characters in *Pavithram* (Sacred, 1994),[89] *Hitler* (1996),[90] *Valliettann* (Big brother, 2000)[91] and so on. To emphasise this further, there is a scene where Shammy/Faasil looks at himself in the mirror, grooms his moustache and calls himself 'a complete man.' In a violent altercation scene during the climax, he even utters, 'Shammy hero aada hero' (Shammy is a hero). By the end of the movie, it is apparent that Shammy's inability to become the hero/patriarch of the family turns him into a mentally unstable figure.

The other subaltern male characters—Saji, Bony, Bobby and Franky (played by Soubin Shahir, Sreenath Bhasi, Shane Nigam and Mathew Thomas, respectively)—get almost equal screen time in the movie. This itself derails the construct of films having a singular hero played by the male star. The other male characters, whom Shammy considers as not belonging to a 'cultured family' and not masculine, are depicted as more sensible and compassionate. The idea of a 'proper' middle-class family, which is usually bolstered in films for being the space of domestic contentment, is disputed in *Kumbalangi Nights*. The film recognises problematic power relations within a heterosexual family and shows the middle-class household as a place of power play, where women most often live in constant fear; it is the space of the most violent attacks—physical and emotional—against women and children.^[92] *Kumbalangi Nights* remains a notable example of Faasil's filmography manifesting the transition of the hero to a villain, thereby deconstructing masculinity and the patriarchal family. There are many other movies of Faasil where a similar pattern in varying degrees is visible.

In the film *Joji* (2021),^[93] based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1623), Faasil, though a major star, plays the role of the youngest son Joji in a traditional wealthy Christian family instead of the masculine and all-powerful patriarch Kuttappan Panachal (played by Spadikam Sunny) or the two elder brothers—Jomon Panachel (Baburaj) and Jaison Panachel (Joji Mundakkayam). Joji is a meek young man who is closer to his teenager nephew Poppy (Alister Alex) and distances himself from the family's elder male members. The narrative traces how the persisting patriarchy in the family leads Joji to plot the murder of his father and elder brother. The film shows the patriarchal power play within a seemingly ordinary family and how the less dominant men, women and children experience the space. Joji can be called a victim of patriarchy, and to liberate himself from its entanglement, he goes to the extent of patricide and fratricide. The film is named after the main character Joji who becomes a murderer. By not accepting his crime and not feeling remorse for his action, the character's fate is left without closure in the film. Faasil gained international acclaim for his performance as Joji.^[94]

Along with the deconstruction of patriarchy in Faasil's films, it is essential to note the role female characters play within the narrative. Female characters in Faasil's films are strong, articulate and they have agency. They are instrumental in the positive transformations of male characters, including the hero. This is exemplified by characters like Baby Mol in *Kumbalangi Nights* (2019), Shoshanna in *Amen* (2013), Jincy in *Maheshinte Prathikaram* (2016) and Isha in *Haram* (2015).^[95] This reformative aspect of masculinity manifested by the central male hero is an important feature that characterises Faasil's films. Moreover, the idea of a patriarchal family is deconstructed and portrayed sarcastically in his films.^[96] The patriarch, in many instances, fails to exercise his power, as in the case of Shammy in *Kumbalangi Nights* (2019), and the father figure is mostly absent or is killed, as in *Iyobinte Pusthakam* (The book of Iyob, 2014)^[97] and *Joji* (2021). Many of Faasil's films open up alternative ways of thinking about patriarchal families, disrupting the existing patterns centred on hegemonic masculinity.

Castrated hero: Male body and psyche as a site of contest

An analysis of Faasil's career reveals the multiple and often unusual ways in which his films use the male body. In *22 Female Kottayam* (2012),^[98] his character is castrated and symbolically, the trope of castration continues in his later films in various manifestations of physical or mental infirmity. In *22 Female Kottayam* (2012), Cyril (played by Faasil) is a travel agency manager who traps women into doing sexual favours in lieu of helping them to migrate to foreign countries. It is by such a means that Cyril traps Tessa (Rima Kallingal), a nurse from Kottayam. Cyril also helps his boss Hegde (Prathap Pothan) to take advantage of Tessa, which leads to her being brutally raped by Hegde twice. To avenge herself, Tessa tricks Cyril and surgically removes his genitals. Though the movie has its limitations, including representing women as continuing victims of patriarchy,^[99] castration has emerged as a major theme in Malayalam cinema through this film. More than the act, castration is highly symbolic as the 'penis or

phallus is a synonym for masculinity and power ... and in everyday thinking, the loss of power, leadership, authority, or ability is frequently interpreted as a symbolic castration.'^[100] In this film, castration symbolises a blow to toxic masculinity and, as an actor employing his body to represent such an act, Faasil deconstructs the existing notions of a hero in a film.

In *Akam* (meaning 'Inside,' 2012), based on Malayattoor Ramakrishnan's classic psychological-thriller novel *Yakshi* (1967),^[101] Sreenivas's (played by Faasil) face is disfigured in an accident. This causes him much mental turmoil, and he starts hallucinating that his wife Ragini (played by Anumol) is a *yakshi* (a blood-sucking female demon). Sreeni, in the film, is 'probably more prone to an erectile dysfunction in the face of the monstrous feminine' and 'the linkages between vagina dentata and semen loss anxiety syndrome haunt both the visual and libidinal economies of *Akam*.'^[102] The films, *22 Female Kottayam* (2012) and *Akam* (2012), place the male body as the centre of contest and castration. This marks a major digression from the mainstream masculine representations in Malayalam films which glorify the star body, especially the upper caste feudal male body, as a site of desire and celebration. A pattern of mutilated or disabled male characters continues in Faasil's films, including *Artist* (2013)^[103] and *Olipporu* (The guerilla war, 2013).^[104] In the former, he plays Michel Agnelo, an eccentric artist who loses his eyesight in an accident, and in the latter, he plays Ajayan, who is on his deathbed throughout the film, while his alter ego narrates the story.

Along with constant experimentation with the politics of the male body, many of Faasil's films also place the male psyche at its centre. Such representations, we argue, also deal with the complexities and problems of becoming a man in current times. This is seen in films like *Natholi Oru Cheriya Meenalla* (2013), *North 24 Kaatham* (2013),^[105] *1 by Two* (2014),^[106] *Ayal Njanalla* (He is not me, 2015),^[107] *Athiran* (2019),^[108] *Kumbalangi Nights* (2019), *Irul* (Darkness, 2021),^[109] and so on. In *Natholi Oru Cheriya Meenalla* (2013), directed by V.K. Prakash, Preman (played by Faasil) is a caretaker of a flat in Kochi whom the residents call Natholi (Indian anchovy, a small-sized sea fish) for his weak stature. A writer during his free time, Preman creates a fictional alter ego Narendran (played by Faasil), through whom he fulfils his masculine desires that are not possible in real life. In *North 24 Kaatham*, he plays the role of Hari, an intelligent software professional who has an Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder (OCPD), and the film shows Hari's transformation into an empathetic person with the arrival of Narayani (Swathi Reddy). In *Kumbalangi Nights* (2019), Shammi (Faasil), who appears initially as a caring husband and brother-in-law, turns out to be a psychopath when the women in his house do not align with his patriarchal commands. Shammi's 'madness,' we argue, has more of a social dimension than a personal one.

Fahadh Faasil becoming the metrosexual hero

A metrosexual man is defined as one (straight or gay) who lives in an urban, capitalist culture with a high disposable income, is very careful about his appearance and spends a lot of money and time on grooming.^[110] He is a consumerist, often a narcissist, sensitive man, and has a feminine side that he does not conceal. He is considered a product of consumer capitalism. These market-driven masculinities are affected by the 'gender-neutral language of "market," "individual," and "choice".'^[111] Globalisation's impact on the locales shapes these masculinities, and they have to confront diverse challenges as never before. Faasil has been called Malayalam's first metrosexual actor by popular journals.^[112] Many of Faasil's movies show him as a metrosexual man living within the city space. The city as the setting of the films has contributed significantly to shaping the characters in many 'New Generation' films.^[113] The fast urbanisation of Kerala and the migration of Malayali youth to the nearby metro cities such as Bangalore and Chennai to work in multinational companies and take part in the consumer-capital culture they promote creates a constant exchange between their rural homes and urban dwellings and lifestyles. Faasil's metrosexual characters represent this tension between the urban and the rural value systems.

The rural in his films is not an ideal space or one which invokes nostalgia (as usually seen in Malayalam movies), but a space which contains gender norms, hierarchies and value systems which the urban man (and woman) find difficult to cope with. *Diamond Necklace* (2012),^[114] *Varathan* (The newcomer, 2018)^[115] and *Carbon* (2018)^[116] can be cited as examples here. In these films, the male lead has to constantly refashion himself and undergo crises because of the conflict between the urban and the rural.

The desire for capital and consumption, which are features of the metrosexual man, can be seen in Faasil's characters such as Dr Arun in *Diamond Necklace* (2012), Sibi in *Carbon* (2018) and Prakashan in *Njan Prakashan* (I am Prakashan, 2018).^[117] Arun in *Diamond Necklace* (2012) is a well-earning oncologist based in Dubai who leads a luxurious life and lives on credit cards. He is in debt but maintains his luxurious lifestyle, hiding his debts. The film shows his encounters with multiple women/lovers, each leaving a mark on his character. Sibi in *Carbon* (2018), in a way, personifies the longing for money to become rich and the attempts to gain it by any means.

Varathan (2018) is a remarkable example of a new kind of metrosexual masculinity, which emerges out of the changed gender equations promoted by a neoliberal city space,^[118] but exemplifies the same conflicts with the masculine ideals of the village. Faasil, as Abin in *Varathan* (2018), comes back from Dubai to rural Kerala along with his wife. He is the one who makes tea for the guests who come home while his wife talks to them. Such a scene was uncommon in Malayalam cinema until recently, as receiving the guest was always depicted as the woman's task. The scene shows his changed gender sensitivity and manhood ideals. But in the village, he has to confront traditional masculinity when hooligans ogle at and, later on, sexually assault his wife. This leads to a crisis in his masculinity, and he is shown changing himself into a hypermasculine figure who violently and eccentrically attacks the villains. This change is also brought about by his wife's explicit expression of frustration with his earlier passive responses to the harassment she underwent. She expected him to respond aggressively in a conventional masculine way, which suggests a lingering influence of traditional notions of gender despite her metropolitan sensitivities. It is also interesting to note that after subjugating the attackers, with the help of his wife who wields a gun, Abin asks his friend to inform the police. This final act of relying on legal means undercuts the possible heroic aura that can accompany fight scenes in the film. It is also to be noted that even his retaliation was an act of self-defence while being surrounded by the attackers, and his awareness of himself as a subject to law is in direct contrast to the heroes of superstar films who impulsively incite violence when their male egos are bruised and project their disregard for the law as a marker of heroic masculinity. Faasil's metrosexual characters, we argue, can be considered to depict post-liberalised masculine concerns where consumerism and capitalism affect men differently, including challenging their centrality in family and society.

Conclusion

The article argues that Fahadh Faasil—his star persona and the characters he plays—signifies a shift in notions of masculinity, heroism and stardom in contemporary Malayalam cinema. In contrast to the hypermasculine upper-caste characters popularised by films of the two major stars Mammooty and Mohanlal in the 1990s, Faasil's characters reconstitute gender relations within Malayalam films by considerably reorienting masculinity. Besides considering his onscreen representations, the article has traced Faasil's off-screen engagements to decipher the transition he represents in Malayalam cinema with regard to stardom. We have also argued that Faasil's portrayals represent the different crises of men in post-liberalised Kerala. His films in a way showcase gender fluidity which Malayalam cinema recently began to explore as a major theme.^[119]

Even though Faasil is indicative of this shift in the portrayal of masculinity, heroism and stardom in Malayalam cinema, we are not arguing that he singularly achieved it. It is also not that Faasil's characters overthrow heteronormative patriarchy and masculinity, but rather, they succeed in creating ruptures to

existing models of masculinity and heroism in cinema by opening up spaces for alternative masculine expressions which are more inclusive. The changed genderscape of Kerala and the emergence of 'New Generation' cinema has played a significant role in this regard. While Faasil and his characters are specimens of the rupture, it is also evident in select films of other 'New Generation' male actors of Malayalam as well, including: Tovino Thomas, *Kala* (Weed, 2021)^[120] and *Oru Kuprasidha Payyan* (A notorious youngster, 2018);^[121] Nivin Pauly, *Hey Jude* 2018^[122] and *Kanakam Kaamini Kalaham* (Gold, Lover, Quarrel, 2021);^[123] Asif Ali, *Uyare* (Up above, 2019)^[124] and *Kettiyanu Ente Malakha* (My wife is my angel, 2019),^[125] among others. The characters they played in these films demonstrate the problems of becoming all-powerful patriarchal heroes in contemporary times within certain narratives. Faasil can be considered as an icon who exemplifies the shifts associated with becoming a hero and star in contemporary Malayalam Cinema. Bordering on queerness and metro sexuality, Faasil's characters embody new ways of performing masculinity in Malayalam cinema, by shifting the focus from anger and revenge to vulnerability and reform.

Notes

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[2] The Malayalam film industry is primarily based in the state of Kerala in India. It produces films in the regional language of Malayalam.

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[5] Jonathan Matusitz and Pam Payano, 'Globalisation of Popular Culture: From Hollywood to Bollywood,' *South Asia Research* 32(2) (2012): 123–38, specifically p. 127.

[6] Debjani Mukherjee, 'Space, screen and the Indian multiplex film,' *South Asian Popular Culture* 19(1) (2021): 63–65, specifically p. 63, doi: [10.1080/14746689.2021.1879169](https://doi.org/10.1080/14746689.2021.1879169).

[7] [Vishal Menon](#), 'How Closed Theatres And The Pandemic Opened Many Doors For Fahadh Faasil,' *Film Companion*, 10 July 2021, accessed 2 October 2023.

[8] More than 18 people died following Nipah virus outbreak in different parts of Kerala in May–June 2018. With a mortality rate of nearly 90 per cent, this was one of the deadliest pandemic outbreaks that occurred in the history of the state. Several thousands of people were also quarantined during the period of the virus outbreak.

[9] Suresh Gopi and Jayaram were two other major male stars of the period in Malayalam Cinema who can be placed after Mohanlal and Mammooty in terms of stardom. While Suresh Gopi became famous through his aggressive masculine roles, especially as police officer or bureaucrat, Jayaram became famous through his roles as patriarchal family men.

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[12] R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995, p. 77.

[13] Sujithkumar Parayil, 'Visual Perception and Cultural Memory: Typecast and Typecast(e)ing in Malayalam cinema,' *Synoptique* 3(1) (2014): 67–98, specifically p. 68; Meena T. Pillai, 'The Many Misogynies of Malayalam Cinema,' *Economic and Political Weekly* 52(33) (2017): 52–58, specifically p. 53.

- [14] Meraj Ahmed Mubarki, 'Body, Masculinity and the Male Hero in Hindi Cinema,' *Social Semiotics* 30(2) (2020): 225–53, specifically p. 16.
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- [16] Jose K. Manuel, *New Generation Cinema*, Kottayam: DC Books, 2012, p. 16.
- [17] [*Neelathamara*](#). 102 mins, 2009, produced by Menaka Suresh Kumar, directed by Lal Jose, *Sun NXT*, accessed 11 Sep. 2022.
- [18] [*Rathinirvedam*](#). 103 mins, 2011 produced by Menaka Suresh Kumar, directed by T. K. Rajeev Kumar, *Hotstar*, accessed 11 Sep. 2022.
- [19] [*Pokkiri Raja*](#). 165 min, 2010, produced by Tomichan Mulakupadam, directed by Vysakh, *Prime Video*, accessed 13 Sep. 2022.
- [20] [*Happy Husbands*](#). 162 mins, 2010, produced by Milan Jaleel, directed by Saji Surendran, *Prime Video*, accessed 13 Sep. 2022.
- [21] [*Christian Brothers*](#). 181 min, 2011, produced by A.V. Anoop and Maha Subair, directed by Joshiy, *Prime Video*, accessed 14 Sep. 2022.
- [22] Ratheesh Radhakrishnan, 'Soft porn and the Anxieties of the Family: The Gendering of the Imagined Addressee of Malayalam Cinema,' in *Women in Malayalam Cinema: Naturalising Gender Hierarchies*, ed. Meena T. Pillai, 194–220, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2010, specifically p. 194.
- [23] [*Narasimham*](#). 174 mins, 2000, produced by Antony Perumbavoor, directed by Shaji Kailas, *YouTube*, accessed 16 Sep. 2022. *Narasimham* (*nara* meaning man and *simham* meaning lion) is the fourth incarnation of God Vishnu in the Hindu mythology. *Narasimham* is part lion and part man and incarnated to kill the demon king Hiranyakashipu.
- [24] [*Devasuram*](#). 160 mins, 1993, produced by V.B.K. Menon, directed by I.V. Sasi, *Prime Video*, accessed 18 Sep. 2022.
- [25] [*Paleri Manikyam: Oru Pathirakolapathakathinte Katha*](#), 155 mins, 2009, produced by A.V. Anoop and Maha Subair, directed by Ranjith, *Sun NXT*, accessed 18 Sep. 2022.
- [26] [*Pranchiyettan and the Saint*](#). 140 min, 2010, produced by Ranjith, directed by Ranjith, *Sun NXT*, accessed 20 September 2022.
- [27] Swapna Gopinath, 'Hypermasculine Images and the Hindu Identity in Malayalam Cinema,' in *The Culture and Politics of Populist Masculinities*, ed. Hakola, Outi, Janne Salminen, Juho Turpeinen and Oscar Winberg, 149–65, London: Lexington Books, 2021, specifically p. 153.
- [28] [*Dhrona 2010*](#). 145 mins, 2010, produced by Sunil Kumar, directed by Shaji Kailas, *Dailymotion*, accessed 22 Sep. 2022. Drona or Dronacharya is a character in the Hindu epic Mahabharata. He is believed to be the preceptor of Kauravas and Pandavas, the two groups of warring cousins in the epic poem.
- [29] [*Simhasanam*](#). 159 mins, 2012, produced by S. Chandrakumar, directed by Shaji Kailas, *Prime Video*, accessed 22 Sep. 2022.
- [30] [*Krishnanum Radhayum*](#). 154 mins, 2011, produced by Santhosh Pandit, directed by Santhosh Pandit, *Dailymotion*, accessed 23 Sep. 2022.
- [31] [*Superstar Santhosh Pandit*](#). 121 mins, 2012, produced by Santhosh Pandit, directed by Santhosh Pandit, *YouTube*, accessed 25 Sep. 2022.
- [32] [*Traffic*](#). 116 mins, 2011, produced by Listin Stephen, directed by Rajesh Pillai, *Hotstar*, accessed 25 Sep. 2022.
- [33] [*Vipin K. Kadavath*](#), 'Making Sense of "New Generation" in Malayalam Cinema,' *MCPH Film Club-The Journal*, 2018, accessed 7 Nov. 2023.
- [34] Swapna Gopinath and Sony Jalarajan Raj, 'Gender Construct as a Narrative and Text: The Female Protagonist in New-

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[35] NV Mohammad Rafi, 'Vellithirayil Azhinjuveezhunna Aanatha Roopangal' (Masculine figures falling loose on the silver screen), *Madhyamam Weekly*, Sep. 2021: 52–59.

[36] *Lucifer*. 172 mins, 2019, produced by Antony Perumbavoor, directed by Prithviraj Sukumaran, *Prime Video*, accessed 22 Sep. 2022.

[37] *Aaraattu*. 166 mins, 2022, produced by RD Illuminations and MPM Group, directed by B. Unnikrishnan, *Prime Video*, accessed 26 Sep. 2022.

[38] Bindu Menon Mannil, 'The Gendered Film Worker: Women in Cinema Collective, Intimate Publics and the Politics of Labour,' *Studies in South Asian Film & Media* 11(2) (2020): 191–207, specifically p. 195.

[39] *Kayyethum Doorath*. 146 mins, 2002, produced by Fazil, directed by Fazil, *Prime Video*, accessed 26 Sep. 2022.

[40] *Kerala Café* (Segment: *Mrityunjayam*), 160 mins, 2009, produced by Ranjith, directed by Uday Ananthan, *YouTube*, accessed 11 Nov. 2022.

[41] *Pramani*. 133 min, 2010, produced by B.C. Joshy, directed by B. Unnikrishnan, *Sun NXT*, accessed 26 Sep. 2022.

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[43] *Best of Luck*. 140 mins, 2010, produced by Laiju Raghavan and Vinil Vasu, directed by M.A. Nishad, *Sun NXT*, accessed 27 Sep. 2022.

[44] *Cocktail*. 104 mins, 2010, produced by Milan Jaleel, directed by Arun Kumar, *Prime Video*, accessed 27 Sep. 2022.

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[46] *Akam*. 94 mins, 2014, produced by Box Office Cinema India Pvt Ltd, directed by Shalini Usha Nair, *Daily Motion*, accessed 30 Sep. 2022.

[47] Holly M. Hapke, 'Theorizing Patriarchy: Development Paradoxes and the Geography of Gender in South Asia,' *Gender, Technology and Development* 17(1) (2013): 1–29, specifically p.18.

[48] Ritty Lukose, 'Consuming Globalization: Youth and Gender in Kerala, India,' *Journal of Social History* 38(4) (2005): 915–35, specifically p. 918.

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[65] [Fahadh Faasil](#), interview by Santhosh George Jacob, *Fahadh Faasil on Fans Associations*, Manorama Online, 17 Feb. 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gK20lsp49A>, accessed 2 Oct. 2023.

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[72] [Maheshinte Prathikaram](#), 110 mins, 2016, produced by Aashiq Abu, directed by Dileesh Pothan, *Prime Video*, accessed 30 Sep. 2022.

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[74] N.P. Sajeesh, *Thiramalayalathinte Avasthantharangal* (Transitions in cine Malayalam), Thiruvananthapuram: The State Institute of Languages, 2007, p. 17.

[75] *Om* is a major symbol of Hinduism considered to be very sacred among believers.

[76] Shyamasri Maji, 2019. 'The Culinary as "Border": Perspectives on Food and Femininity in the Indian Subcontinent,' *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* 4(4–5): 306–24.

[77] [Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum](#), 135 mins, 2017, produced by Sandip Senan and Anish M. Thomas, directed by Dileesh Pothan, *Hotstar*, accessed 05 Oct. 2022. In the English translation of this film title, '[mainour](#)' is from Old English law meaning,

'Stolen property found in the hands of the thief.' See *Collins English Dictionary*, s.v. mainour, accessed 17 Nov. 2023.

[78] *Amen*. 149 min, 2013, produced by Fareed Khan, directed by Lijo Jose Pellissery, *Sun NXT*, accessed 07 Oct. 2022.

[79] The trope of revenge is widely used in superstar movies to establish the hero's pre-eminence, as evident in the films like *Dhruvam* (1993), *Narasimham* (2000), *Ravanaprabhu* (Lord Ravana, 2001) and others. See *Dhruvam*. 138 mins, 1993, produced by M. Mani, directed by Joshy, *YouTube*, accessed 07 Nov. 2022; *Ravanaprabhu*. 168 mins, 2001, produced by Antony Perumbavoor, directed by Ranjith, *Prime Video*, accessed 09 Nov. 2022.

[80] Ann Mary George, *Starring Cinema Production and Stardom in Malayalam Cinema*, English and Foreign Languages University Hyderabad, 2017, p. 102.

[81] Crispin foolishly starts an unnecessary and avoidable fight in an attempt to showcase his masculinity—and terribly fails. Crispin is also shown to be a Mohanlal fan who enjoys and takes pride in the feudal characters played by the star.

[82] B. Shibu, 'Actor's Age and the Production of Multiple Masculinities in the Context of Malayalam Cinema,' *Government Arts and Science College Research Journal* 10(1) (2020): 118–41.

[83] Blais Johny, 'Vellithirayil Vazhunnaravum Veezhunnaravum' (Those who reign and fall on the silver screen), *Madhayamam Weekly* Oct. (2019): 12–25.

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[85] *Natholi Oru Cheriya Meenalla*. 118 min, 2013, produced by Aji Medayil, Joe Kaithamattam and Christi Kaithamattam directed by V. K. Prakash, *Prime Video*, accessed 07 Oct. 2022.

[86] *Kumbalangi Nights*. 133 min, 2019, produced by Fahadh Faasil, Nazriya Nazim, Dileesh Pothan and Syam Pushkaran, directed by Madhu C. Narayanan, *Prime Video*, accessed 09 Oct. 2022.

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[91] *Valliettann*. 171 mins, 2000, produced by Anil Ambalakkara and Baiju Amabalakkara, directed by Shaji Kailas, *Prime Video*, accessed 25 Oct. 2022.

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